

# The Last Word

## A Bible Study on Revelation by Stan Key

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup>And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" <sup>3</sup>But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. <sup>4</sup>I wept and wept, because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. <sup>5</sup>Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep, for the **Lion** of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." <sup>6</sup>Then I saw a **Lamb**, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The **Lamb** had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup>He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup>And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the **Lamb**. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. <sup>9</sup>And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. <sup>10</sup>You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." <sup>11</sup>Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. <sup>12</sup>In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the **Lamb**, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" <sup>13</sup>Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the **Lamb** be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" <sup>14</sup>The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped (Rev. 5:1-14)





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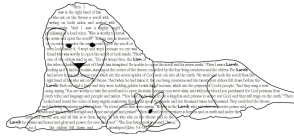
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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### I. A Brave, New World.

The last book of the Bible is unlike any other book in the New Testament. Though parts of the Old Testament (Daniel, Ezekiel) have some occasional similarities, there is little in the Bible that prepares us for what we encounter in the book of Revelation. Reading this book demands a **sanctified imagination!** Consider:

- Dragons, beasts, ten-headed monsters.
- Visions of heaven (warfare, throne room, etc.).
- Angel armies.
- Mysterious numbers (e.g., 666).
- Seals are opened, trumpets blown, bowls poured out, horsemen released, etc.
- Final judgment.
- Plagues and destruction of cosmic proportions.
- Two cities: a new Jerusalem on earth and an old Babylon destroyed.
- Two women: one a prostitute, the other a holy mother.
- A holy Trinity and an unholy “trinity” (Satan, Antichrist, False Prophet).
- Mortal combat between a dragon and a lamb (Who do you think will win?).
- The repetition of the number seven (churches, seals, trumpets, plagues, etc.).

Revelation introduces us to a world “in which children are instinctively at home and in which adults, by becoming as little children, recapture an elemental involvement in the basic conflicts and struggles that permeate moral existence....” (Eugene Peterson, p. x).

The result of such unfamiliar territory, has caused many Christians to:

- A. **Ignore** the book.
- B. **Over-emphasize** the book.
- C. **Misinterpret** the book.

### II. Finding the right approach.

- A. Recognize the importance of literary form (genre).

From about 200 BC to about 100 AD a new genre of Jewish literature appeared. Called ‘apocalyptic literature’ (from the Greek term *apokalupsis*, meaning ‘unveiling’ or ‘revelation’), these writings sought to inspire hope to God’s people in the midst of great adversity. This literature made great use of remarkable symbolism and visions and had several recognizable themes:

- 1) The **conflict** of good and evil.
- 2) If we understand the **future**, we can survive and thrive today.
- 3) God is in control of **history**.

Revelation (and Daniel) clearly falls into this type of literature. However, it is important to recognize how Revelation goes beyond the Jewish genre and has additional characteristics that make it unique:

- 4) The author of Revelation calls his book a '**prophecy**' (1:3; 22:7,10,18,19).
- 5) Jewish apocalyptic literature was nearly always pseudonymous but Revelation clearly identifies its author as 'John' (1:4,9; 22:8).
- 6) Jewish apocalyptic literature was generally pessimistic about the present age, but Revelation maintains a **balanced realism** of hope in the midst of trial (John 16:33).
- 7) While most apocalyptic literature sought to focus on the future, the book of Revelation has a strong **moral message** for today (calls to repentance, etc.).
- 8) John's book includes seven **pastoral letters**, something never encountered in other apocalyptic literature.

B. Historically, there have been four basic interpretive approaches to this book:

- 1) *The contemporary-historical approach.* The basic idea here is that John is writing about events occurring in the **first century** (the Beast is Nero; the Great Prostitute is Rome, etc.). Thus, most of the prophecies of the book would have been fulfilled with either the fall of Jerusalem (70 AD) or the fall of Rome (476 AD). The primary weakness of this view is that the overwhelming victory portrayed in the later chapters of Revelation was never achieved in history.
- 2) *The historicist approach.* This view believes that Revelation is a **prediction** of events from the writer's day to our own... and beyond. Examining the prophecies, one can find indications of the history of Western Europe, the Reformation, the French Revolution, the re-establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948, etc. The weakness of this approach is seen in the fact that few interpreters can agree on which symbols in the book point to which events in history.
- 3) *The futurist approach.* Most popular understanding of Revelation is here (Dispensationalism, *Left Behind*, etc.). The basic idea is that everything after Revelation 4:1 belongs in a period still **in the future**, focusing on events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ. Often, this position claims that the seven churches represent seven successive ages of church history building to the rapture of the church in 4:1 (?). The weakness of this view is that it means the book would have had little significance for those to whom it was addressed in the first century.
- 4) *The idealist approach.* This school of interpretation claims that the book does not refer to any specific historical events or time periods at all. Rather it is **symbolic and spiritual**, a type of theological poem, that expresses the ageless conflict between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness.

Robert H. Mounce sums up the matter succinctly when he says: "It is readily apparent that each approach has some important contribution to a full understanding of Revelation and that no single approach is sufficient in itself."<sup>1</sup>

There is no textual indication that John meant for his book to be used as a kind of **crystal ball** or Ouija Board to predict future events. It takes much creative

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<sup>1</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 43.

speculation to transform the book of Revelation into vast, sweeping charts and time-lines of human history that outlines the chronology of world events for us today. John was writing as a pastor to help the believers in the churches of Asia both survive and thrive as they lived in the evil empire of first century Rome. His words certainly point to the future and the final victory of the Lamb. But what he has to say is profitable for all believers everywhere whether they live under Nero, Attila the Hun, Ivan the Terrible, Vlad the Impaler, Napoleon, Pol Pot, Stalin, Hitler, Idi Amin, etc. Conclusion: The book of Revelation is not a call to **decipher a code** but rather an invitation to **trust in the Lamb!**

### III. Overview of Revelation

- A. The simplest structure for the book is outlined in 1:19. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

| The things you have seen | The things that are | The things that are to take place after this |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--|
| 1                        | 2                   | 3 4 22                                       |

- B. A more complete outline of the book might look like this:

- I. Introduction (1:1–20).
- II. Letters to the seven churches (2:1–3:22).
- III. Heavenly vision of the Lamb (4:1–5:14).
- IV. The seven seals (6:1–7:17).
- V. The seven trumpets (8:1–11:19).
- VI. War between the forces of good and evil (12:1–14:20).
- VII. The seven last plagues (15:1–16:21).
- VIII. The fall of Babylon (17:1–19:21).
- IX. The millennial reign and final judgment (20:1–15).
- X. A new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem (21:1–22:5).
- XI. Epilogue (22:6–21).

- C. What can we learn from the structure?

1. There is a building double crescendo that climaxes in:
  - a. **Judgment** (ch. 17–20). Therefore, “repent.”
  - b. **Salvation** (ch. 21–22). Therefore, “be steadfast.”
2. There is a recurrence of **contrast** between: God and Satan, the Lamb and the dragon, good and evil, Babylon and Jerusalem, the prostitute and the bride, salvation and judgment.
3. The number 7 is obviously very important to God.

### IV. Why study Revelation?

- A. It is an **understandable** word.

Don’t believe the lie that pretends Revelation is written in **code language** so that only those with special training or spiritual gifting can decipher it! When it was read aloud to the seven churches in the first century, we can believe that they understood its meaning. So can we. Therefore, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near” (22:10).

B. It is a **pastoral** word.

The book is addressed to the seven churches in the province of Asia (1:4). In all probability John was their pastor (or bishop, or part of the pastoral team providing oversight for their care). So when John writes of the Beast, the trumpets, the plagues, etc. he is not writing as a speculative theologian interested in eschatology. He is writing as a shepherd concerned **for his sheep**! The book is a pastoral letter written to help Christians living in the Evil Empire. It should be read as a Survivor's Guide to life in Babylon: how to live victoriously in a world of temptation, persecution, false doctrine, apostasy, demonic hordes, and constant pressure simply to say, "Caesar is Lord."

C. It is a **blessed** word.

Those who read this book out loud and those who listen to it and obey its teaching are promised a blessing. In fact, there are seven (!) beatitudes promised in this book:

- 1) Blessed is the one who **reads aloud** the words of this prophesy, and blessed are those who hear it, and who keep what is written in it... (1:3).
- 2) Blessed are **the dead** who die in the Lord from now on... that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them! (14:13).
- 3) Blessed is the one who **stays awake**, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed! (16:15).
- 4) Blessed are those who are invited to the **marriage supper** of the Lamb. (19:9).
- 5) Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will **reign with him** for a thousand years (20:6).
- 6) Blessed is the one who **keeps the words** of the prophecy of this book (22:7).
- 7) Blessed are those who **wash their robes**, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city... (22:14).

So perhaps we should admit to having an ulterior motive in studying this book. We want to share in the blessing!

D. It is God's **final** word.

With this book, God's revelation is **complete**. He has nothing more to say. Because it is final. Anyone who adds to or takes from this word is cursed (22:18–19).

*What more can he say, than to you he has said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled? (John Rippon, 1787).*

Recognize, however, that for John, the "word" (Greek, *logos*) is not simply a spoken sound or a written document. God's final Word in its ultimate expression is Jesus! (see John 1:1,14).

*The revelation **of** Jesus Christ.... He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word [logos] of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ...(1:1–2).*

This final book is a "revelation *of* Jesus Christ." The preposition is important! The book is not only mediated *by* (or *from*) Jesus; it is an unveiling **of** Christ himself in

all his glory and power! The purpose of God's final word is not just that we know about the future, but that we **know Him!**

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!....And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped. (5:12, 14).*

The word "amen" comes from a Hebrew word meaning firm, dependable, trustworthy, certain, and true. Anyone who says "amen" to a prayer or doxology, shows that he is in agreement with what has been said and makes it his own. "So be it"... "May it be true"... Thus, it is fitting that the last word of the book is an invitation for all of us to make our own personal affirmation of the Lamb in all that he **is**, in all that he **has done**, and in all that he **will yet accomplish** in the future. And all God's people said, "**Amen!**" (22:21).

### TABLE TALK

1. Describe your own experience with the book of Revelation.
2. How does it change your approach to Revelation to see it as a book written by a pastor concerned about his sheep?
3. The book is not just a revelation *from* Jesus. It is the revelation *of* Jesus. Explain the difference.
4. The book promises a blessing to those who read, listen, and obey. What blessing do you hope to receive in the study of this book?

## **All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name!**

*By Edward Perronet*

All hail the pow'r of Jesus' Name!

Let angels prostrate fall;  
Bring forth the royal diadem,  
And crown Him Lord of all!

Ye chosen seed of Israel's race,  
Ye ransomed from the fall,  
Hail Him Who saves you by His grace,  
And crown Him Lord of all!

Let every kindred, every tribe,  
On this terrestrial ball,  
To Him all majesty ascribe,  
And crown Him Lord of all!

Oh, that with yonder sacred throng  
We at His feet may fall!  
We'll join the everlasting song,  
And crown Him Lord of all!



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## CHAPTER 2. THE ONE WHO HOLDS THE KEYS (CH. 1:1–20).

### I. Outline of Chapter 1.

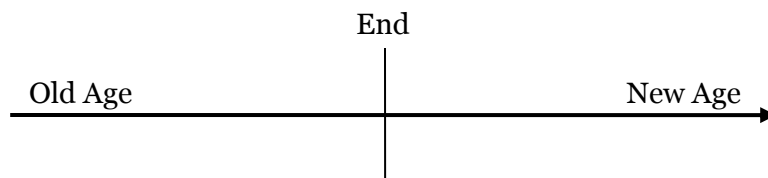
| Prologue<br>(vv. 1–3).   | Pastoral Greetings to the Seven<br>Churches (vv. 4–8).  | John’s Vision Begins<br>(vv. 9–20).  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What this book is about (vv. 1–2).</li> <li>• Promised blessing (v. 3)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grace &amp; peace (vv. 4–5a).</li> <li>• 7 things to know about Jesus (vv. 5:b–7).</li> <li>• “I am...” (v. 8).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The setting (vv. 9–11).</li> <li>• What he sees (vv. 12–16).</li> <li>• What he hears (vv. 17–20).</li> </ul> |

#### A. Prologue. (Rev. 1:1–3)

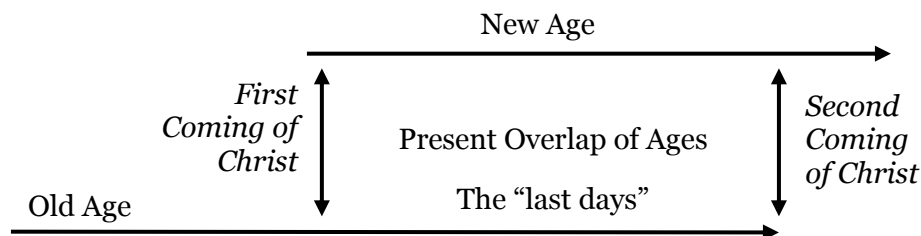
1. It’s all in the prepositions (vv. 1–2). This revelation (*apocalypse*) is:
  - **From** God.
  - Mediated **through** an angel.
  - Given **to** John (and John is to share it with the churches... and to us).
  - It is **about** the events that must soon take place.
  - And it is **of** Jesus. The revelation is not just about future events. Preeminently, it is an unveiling of Jesus: his identity and his work (past, present and future).
2. A blessing (beatitude) is promised to (v. 3):
  - The one who **reads** this book out loud.
  - The one who **hears** what is read.
  - The one who **does** what it tells us to do.
3. “The time is **near**” (v. 3). “I am coming **soon**” (22:7, 12, 20).

These statements were written some 1900 years ago! In what sense is the glorious victory of Jesus Christ and the coming Kingdom “near”? In what sense is Jesus coming “soon”? Even in the New Testament, the question “When?” was passionately asked (Mark 13:4; Acts 1:6–7; I Thessalonians 5:1–11; II Peter 3:8–10; Revelation 6:10).

Christ’s coming changed the way God’s people think about “**the end.**” Before Christ, time was basically conceived in two stages:



But the coming of Christ changed this perspective so that time is now conceived something like this:



Christians live in the land of **in-between**. The life of faith is the call to live victoriously in the interval between the old age and the age to come, the promise and the fulfillment, the **already** and the **not yet**. Some use D-Day and the Battle of Berlin to describe this reality.

B. Pastoral Greetings to the Seven Churches. (Rev. 1:4–8)

1. The book of Revelation is addressed to “the seven churches that are in Asia” (v. 4). These churches are named in verse 11. The book is in reality a **pastoral letter** written to Christians undergoing great difficulty.

But why seven churches? Why not one? Jesus apparently wants us to see the beauty of **unity in diversity** and diversity in unity. Each local church contains part of the truth, a portion of the light. It is when they all work together (7 is the number for wholeness, completion) that the full-orbed beauty of the Gospel is best seen.

2. John tells us seven truths about Jesus Christ, the one “who is and who was and who is to come” (vv. 4–7):
  - a. Who he is (in this present moment):
    - He is the faithful **witness/martyr** (v. 5).
    - He is the **firstborn** from the dead (v. 5).
    - He is the **ruler of kings** on earth (v. 5).
    - He **loves us** (v. 5).
  - b. What he has done (in the past):
    - He has **freed us** from our sins by his blood (v. 5).
    - He has made us a **kingdom** of priests (v. 6). (The church is to be to the world what the Levitical priests were to Israel: mediators and intercessors).
  - c. What he will do (in the future):
    - He is **coming again** (v. 7).
3. As if to confirm and emphasize the truth of what has just been said, Almighty God (the Father) speaks: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come” (v. 8). He is the A and the Z and all that is in between. He is not constrained by the limits of time. He is the **Eternal Now**.

C. John's Vision Begins (vv. 9–20).

1. The setting for the revelation. (Rev. 1:9–11)

In the Greek, the preposition *en* is repeated seven times in verses 9–10.

- a. I, John, your brother and partner *EN* the **tribulation**....
- b. *EN* (understood) the **kingdom**...
- c. *EN* (understood) the **patient endurance**....
- d. *EN* **Jesus**....
- e. I was *EN* the island of **Patmos** on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus...
- f. I was *EN* **the Spirit**...
- g. *EN* the **Lord's day**... (Note: it appears that the Christians were already making a distinction between the Sabbath, the Jewish day of worship, and Sunday, the Christian day of worship).

2. What John saw: the vision. (Rev. 1:12–16)

a. The seven golden lampstands (vv. 12–13).

The lampstands represent the seven churches (v. 20). Thus, the church is not the light, but it is meant to carry the light. Yet these churches were plagued with problems: Ephesus had left her first love, Pergamum was dabbling in the teachings of the Nicolaitans, Thyatira was tolerating that woman Jezebel, Sardis had a good reputation but was really dead, Laodicea was lukewarm, etc. But, if John is going to see Jesus, it will be “in the midst” of these churches!

b. One like a Son of Man (v. 13).

In the Gospels, Jesus referred to himself as “the Son of Man” more than any other title. The title comes from the book of Daniel.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13–14).

The one John saw was “clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest” (v. 13). The word for “robe” describes what Aaron wore as the Great High Priest. Thus, the Son of Man is not only a **King**. He is also a **Priest**; and he exercises these functions now!

John then describes the characteristics of this Son of Man. There are seven elements of his description.

- His *hair* (v. 14). As white as snow. He is **wise and pure**.
- His *eyes* (v. 14). Like a flame of fire. His gaze both penetrates and purifies. Christ doesn't just look *at* us, he look **into** us!
- His *feet* (v. 15). Like burnished bronze. His kingdom will **stand forever**. In Daniel's vision, the statue had feet that were “partly of

iron and partly of clay” (Daniel 2:33). Such a statue is sure to fall. Not King Jesus!

- His *voice* (v. 15). Like the roar of many waters. Many did not hear the Word spoken at Bethlehem (John 1:1–18). But the day is coming soon when **everyone will hear** what the son of man has to say.
- His *right hand* (v. 16). He holds seven stars. Jesus is not controlled by the stars (astrology). He **controls** the stars and the entire the universe by his mighty power!
- His *mouth* (v. 16). From his mouth comes a sharp, two-edged sword. This is the Son of Man’s ultimate weapon...and ours (Eph. 6:17)! His Word **penetrates, cuts** and **discerns** our deepest thoughts and intentions (Hebrews 4:12).
- His *face* (v. 16). Like the sun shining in full strength. Perhaps John was remembering the Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus’ face “shone like the sun” (Matthew 17:2). The culmination of our Christian journey will be when we see him **face to face** (22:4).

3. What John heard: the word. **Read verses 17–20.**

- a. **“Fear not...”** (vv. 17–18). Though John’s vision is unlike anything anyone has ever seen before, there is no reason to fear because he is already **in the kingdom** (vv. 9–10) and Jesus has already overcome sin, death, hell and Satan. Jacques Ellul says that the entire book of Revelation “can be summed up in this word: *fear not*” (p. 105).
- b. “I have **the keys** of Death and Hades...” (v. 18). What he shuts, no one can open. What he opens, no one can shut. Nothing happens without the permission of King Jesus!
- c. “Therefore **write...**” (vv. 19–20). Others need to know the vision John has seen and hear the words that he has heard.

II. The Excellency of Christ.

A. Behold, the Man.

This book is “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1) and here in the first chapter we see both who Jesus is and what Jesus does (past, present, and future). The revelation of Jesus seems to fall into two categories:

| Mercy & Grace   | Justice & Law   |
|---|---|
| He loves us (v. 5).<br>He died for us, forgave us (v. 5).<br>He says “Fear not!” (v. 17). | He is ruler of kings of earth (1:5).<br>Those who pierced him will wail (1:7).<br>His presence is overwhelming (vv. 13–16). |

This double-reality of Jesus Christ comes through most poignantly in Revelation 5:5–6.

*And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the **Lion** of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a **Lamb** standing, as though it had been slain....(5:5–6).*

B. The lion-like Lamb... the lamb-like Lion.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) preached a famous sermon, entitled “The Excellency of Christ,” based on the text Revelation 5:5–6. Edwards spoke of the fact that the final revelation of Jesus Christ shows him to be both a Lamb and a Lion.... not one **or** the other but **both/and**... at the same time! The purpose of his sermon was to show forth the “admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies in Jesus Christ.” His sermon (35 pages) shows the contrasting excellencies that meet in the person and in the work of Jesus.

| As a lamb, Jesus is...            | As a lion, Jesus is...      |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Infinite in condescension         | Infinite in exaltation      |
| Infinite in grace                 | Infinite in justice         |
| Infinite in humility              | Infinite in glory           |
| Infinite in meekness              | Infinite in majesty         |
| Infinite in submission            | Infinite in dominion        |
| Full of trust and reliance on God | Self-sufficient             |
| Takes our sin on himself          | Judges and condemns sin     |
| Delivered over to his enemies     | Victorious over his enemies |

At his first coming, Jesus came humbly, riding on a **donkey**. But when he comes again, he will come on a **white horse**, prepared for war (Revelation 19:11–16). And yet Jesus is one Divine Person... not two. Behold, the excellency of Jesus Christ!

Perhaps the most amazing thing is this: as we follow Jesus the Lion/Lamb and allow his Spirit to transform our hearts and lives, we begin to reflect his glory and discover that his image is **recreated in us!** When we are in Christ, we too become lamb-like and lion-like **at the same time**.

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.... (II Corinthians 3:18).*

C. Living in the land of in-between.

Men and women today live in the time period between **the two comings** of Christ. He came as a Lamb and many did not recognize who he really was. He will come again as a Lion but this time everyone will know his true identity! But why, you may wonder, this interval? Why wouldn't Christ come to us initially in all his power and glory so that no one would mistake who he was? C. S. Lewis speaks eloquently to this question in his book *Mere Christianity*.

*Why is God landing in this enemy-occupied world in disguise and starting a sort of secret society to undermine the devil? Why is he not landing in force, invading it? Is it that He is not strong enough? Well, Christians think He is going to land in force; we do not know when. But we can guess why He is delaying. He wants to **give us the chance** of joining His side freely. I do not suppose you and I would have thought much of a Frenchman who waited till the Allies were marching into Germany and then announced he was on our side. God will invade. But I wonder whether people who ask God to interfere openly and directly in our world quite realize what it will be like when He does. When that happens, it is the end of the world. When the author walks on to the stage the play is over. God is going to invade, all right: but what is the good of saying*

*you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else – something it never entered your head to conceive – comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be **too late** then to choose your side....That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen.... Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it. (pp. 64–65)*

### **TABLE TALK**

1. Discuss something you learned from this study that you had never really grasped before.
2. Describe what it means for you personally to live in the land of in-between, in that time period between Christ's first and second comings, between the promise and the fulfillment, the already and the not yet.
3. John saw Christ "in the midst" of the (dysfunctional) churches. Do you believe it is possible to find Christ outside of church? Explain your answer.
4. What conclusion should we draw from the fact that most (all?) of the seven churches addressed in this book no longer exist?
5. What difference does it make in our daily lives to realize that Jesus Christ is eternal and lives in the "eternal now," not subject to the laws of past, present and future?
6. When you think of Jesus, what image comes to mind, the Lamb or the Lion? Does the thought of him make you feel warm and fuzzy or does it inspire fear? Why is it so important to be fully Biblical in the way we envision Jesus Christ?



# The Last Word

A Bible Study on Revelation by Stan Key

## CHAPTER 3. SEVEN LETTERS TO SEVEN CHURCHES (CH. 2:1–3:22)

### I. Introduction to the Seven Churches.

#### A. A look at the map and a lesson from history.

1. The map shows us that these churches in Asia Minor (today, Turkey) form a kind of circuit. John apparently intended that his book (and each letter to each church) would be read as a kind of **circular letter** by each church.
2. History tells us that none of these churches (?) exist today. Does this mean that their lampstand was **removed?** (2:5).



#### B. The real Senior Pastor.

In these letters, Christ is **inspecting** his church(s): observing, warning, encouraging, etc. Each letter has the same basic structure:

1. **Greeting and introduction:** The letter is addressed to the angel<sup>1</sup> of the church and Jesus Christ is identified (titles and names) as the author.
2. **Body:** The works of the church are recognized and either praised or criticized.
3. **Conclusion:** The letter closes with a plea to hear what has been said and a promise to those who **overcome / conquer**.

#### C. A seven-fold message for each church.

Though each letter is worthy of individual study in and of itself, the real message contained in these letters is found in viewing them **all together**. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (plural)” (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22).

#### D. Seven stages of history?

Many popular interpretations of chapters 2–3 are a form of **Dispensationalism** that claims the 7 churches represent 7 eras of history. The conclusion is usually that we live in the Laodicean age. I see no biblical basis for such an approach.

### II. The Seven Churches.

#### A. Ephesus (2:1–7). The **successful** church.

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Historical Context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acts 18:1–41; 20:17–38 and the book of Ephesians.</li> <li>• Heresy and pseudo-apostles (Nicolaitans).</li> <li>• Persecution.</li> </ul> |
| Titles of Christ   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The one who holds the 7 stars in his right hand.</li> <li>• The one who walks among the 7 lampstands.</li> </ul>                          |

<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Mounce believes that the “angel” is not some sort of guardian angel for each church or some ruling official of the congregation but rather “its prevailing spirit” (*The Book of Revelation*, 66).

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Commendations  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I know your toil and endurance (<i>hupmeno</i>).</li> <li>• I know you cannot bear those who are evil.</li> <li>• I know how you have tested those who claim to be apostles.</li> <li>• I know how you endure patiently and bear up.</li> <li>• I know how you hate the works of the Nicolaitans.</li> </ul> <p>This church was:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Busy</b> in ministry.</li> <li>2. <b>Steady</b> in adversity.</li> <li>3. <b>Solid</b> in theology.</li> </ol> |
| Rebukes        | You have abandoned the love you had at first.   |
| Commands       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Remember</b> from where you have fallen.</li> <li>2. <b>Repent</b>.</li> <li>3. <b>Resume</b> the works you did at first.</li> </ol>   |
| Promises       | The one who conquers will be granted to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.  |
| Threats        | If you don't repent, Jesus will remove your lampstand.  |
| Major Theme    | Love—Is our relationship with Christ characterized by love?   |
| Message for Us | Am I doing the <b>right</b> things for the <b>wrong</b> reasons?  |

B. Smyrna (2:8–11). The **persecuted** church.

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Historical Context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persecution (synagogue of Satan).</li> <li>• Poverty.</li> <li>• Demonic activity.</li> </ul>   |
| Titles of Christ   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first and the last.</li> <li>• The one who died and came to life.</li> </ul>  |
| Commendations      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I know your tribulation.</li> <li>• I know your poverty... but you are <b>rich</b>! (cf. 3:17).</li> <li>• I know the slander you are experiencing.</li> </ul> <p>Some of the slanderous things said against Christians in the 1<sup>st</sup> century included (see Matthew 5:11–12):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are <b>cannibals</b> (eat flesh and drink blood).</li> <li>• You are <b>immoral</b> (love feasts).</li> <li>• You are <b>unpatriotic</b> (refuse to say “Caesar is Lord”).</li> <li>• You are <b>anti-family</b> (children leave parents, a wife leaves a husband, etc.).</li> <li>• You are <b>atheists</b>! (don't worship Zeus, Diana, etc.).</li> <li>• You are <b>arsonists</b> (talk of the end of the world... Nero blames Christians for the fire in Rome).</li> </ul> |
| Rebukes            | None. Suffering and persecution tend to <b>purify</b> the church!  |
| Commands           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not fear what you are about to suffer.</li> <li>• Be faithful unto death.</li> </ul>   |

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Promises       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you are faithful, you will be given the crown of life.</li> <li>The one who conquers will not be hurt by the 2<sup>nd</sup> death.</li> </ul>          |
| Threats        | None   |
| Major Theme    | Persecution—the world around us hates what we represent.   |
| Message for Us | Suffering for Christ is a <b>privilege</b> . God knows! And he will reward our faithfulness. Better to be poor and not know you are rich (2:9) than to be rich and not know you are poor (3:17). |

C. Pergamum (2:12–17). The **heretical** church.

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Historical Context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You dwell where Satan’s throne is.</li> <li>Antipas had been martyred for his faith.</li> </ul>  |
| Titles of Christ   | Him who has the sharp two-edged sword.  |
| Commendations      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You hold fast my name (we can hold on to Christ only because he first <b>holds on to us</b>. See 2:1).</li> <li>You did not deny the faith even in the midst of great adversity.</li> </ul>  |
| Rebukes            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some of you hold the teachings of Balaam.</li> <li>Some of you hold the teachings of the Nicolaitans.</li> </ul> <p>These false teachings condone things that Christ will not tolerate:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sexual immorality.</b></li> <li>Worshiping Christ plus idols.... <b>Syncretism.</b></li> </ol> |
| Commands           | Repent!   |
| Promises           | <p>The one who conquers will be given:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>hidden manna.</li> <li>a white stone with a new name written on it.</li> </ul>  |
| Threats            | If you don’t repent I will come and make war against you with the sword of my mouth.  |
| Major Theme        | Heresy—a <b>half truth</b> is often more dangerous than a lie.  |
| Message for Us     | <p>The sharp, two-edged sword in Jesus’ (see Rev. 1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15,21; Heb. 4:12–13; Eph. 6:17) mouth will either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expose our hearts and save us (like a <b>surgeon’s scalpel</b>).</li> <li>Or condemn us (like an <b>enemy’s weapon</b>).</li> </ul>   |

D. Thyatira (2:18–29). The **tolerant** church.

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Historical Context | A “prophetess” (Jezebel) has a huge influence in the city and is “seducing” followers of Christ to practice sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols (syncretism).   |
| Titles of Christ   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Son of God.</li> <li>• The one who has eyes like a flame of fire.</li> <li>• The one who has feet like burnished bronze.</li> <li>• The one who searches mind and heart.</li> </ul>                         |
| Commendations      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I know your <b>love</b>.</li> <li>• I know your faith.</li> <li>• I know your service.</li> <li>• I know your patient endurance.</li> <li>• I know you are doing more good works now than formerly.</li> </ul>  |
| Rebukes            | You tolerate that “prophetess” Jezebel, who teaches “the deep things of Satan”. God’s concern is not so much with Jezebel and her followers. He will take care of them personally (vv. 21–23). His concern is with the church that tolerates this stuff! |
| Commands           | Hold fast what you have until I come.  |
| Promises           | The one who conquers and keeps the faith until the end: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• will be given authority over the nations.</li> <li>• will be given the morning star.</li> </ul>   |
| Threats            | God will throw all the disciples of Jezebel into great tribulation and eventually kill them... unless they repent.   |
| Major Theme        | Tolerance that remains silent when God’s people practice sexual immorality and syncretism is <b>intolerable</b> . God seems to be almost more angry over the church’s tolerance of sin than the sin itself!  |
| Message for Us     | Churches tend to resemble either Ephesus (2:2–4) where there was <b>truth</b> without love... or Thyatira (2:19–20) where there was <b>love</b> without truth. Oh where can we find a church that is strong in both?                                     |

E. Sardis (3:1–6). The **deceived** church.

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Historical Context | There is no indication that this church was experiencing any persecution from the outside or heresy on the inside. Everything looked good.   |
| Titles of Christ   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The one who has the 7 spirits of God (the 7-fold Spirit).</li> <li>• The one who has the 7 stars.</li> </ul>  |
| Commendations      | There are a few persons in your church who have not soiled their garments... they are worthy to walk with me in white. Even though the church is spiritually dead there are a few members who are spiritually alive (the <b>remnant</b> ). |
| Rebukes            | You have the reputation of being alive, but you are <b>dead</b> !  |

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Commands       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wake up!</li> <li>• Strengthen what <b>remains</b> and is about to die.</li> <li>• Remember what you received and heard and keep it.</li> <li>• Repent.</li> </ul>   |
| Promises       | <p>The one who conquers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• will be clothed in white garments.</li> <li>• his name will never be blotted out of the Book of Life.</li> <li>• Jesus will confess his name before his Father.</li> </ul>  |
| Threats        | If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief... and you will be unprepared.  |
| Major Theme    | You can't judge a book by its cover and you can't judge a church by its activities, programs, or doctrinal statement.   |
| Message for Us | <p>At least six times the New Testament specifically warns us about the danger of self-deception: "Do not be deceived." These verses help us to form six questions of self-examination to help us determine if we are dead when we think we are alive:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do I consider myself to be <b>wise</b>? (I Cor. 3:18–20).</li> <li>2. Is there <b>unconfessed sin</b> in my life? (I Cor. 6:9–11).</li> <li>3. Are my <b>social relationships</b> drawing me toward God or away from God? (I Cor. 15:33).</li> <li>4. Do I imagine that I am immune from the <b>consequences</b> of sinful choices? (Gal. 6:7–8).</li> <li>5. Am I living in any <b>willful disobedience</b> to the known will of God? (James 1:22).</li> <li>6. Do I control my <b>tongue</b>? (James 1:26).</li> </ol> |

F. Philadelphia (3:7–13). The **missionary** church.

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Historical Context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God has given this church a golden opportunity for ministry and cultural impact ("I have set before you an <b>open door</b>").</li> <li>• The synagogue of Satan (false Jews).</li> </ul> |
| Titles of Christ   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The holy one.</li> <li>• The true one.</li> <li>• The one who has the key of David (can shut and open doors).</li> </ul>  |
| Commendations      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have kept my word and not denied my name... though you have little power.</li> <li>• You have patiently endured hardships and trials.</li> </ul>                                      |
| Rebukes            | None   |
| Commands           | Hold fast what you have so that none may seize your crown.   |

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Promises       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The nonbelieving world will soon come and bow before you and will understand that I have loved you!</li> <li>• I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the world.</li> <li>• I am coming soon.</li> <li>• The one who conquers will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ become a pillar in the temple of God.</li> <li>○ have the name of God written on him.</li> <li>○ have the name of the New Jerusalem written on him.</li> <li>○ have Jesus' new name written on him.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Threats        | None   |
| Major Theme    | Jesus has the power to open doors and close them.  |
| Message for Us | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When Jesus opens a door... <b>step forward</b> in faith.</li> <li>• When Jesus closes a door... accept it in <b>humble submission</b>.</li> </ul>   |

G. Laodicea (2:14–22). The **mediocre** church.

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Historical Context | The church has become routine, normal, habitual. The <b>movement</b> has become a machine, the <b>organism</b> has become an organization.   |
| Titles of Christ   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Amen.</li> <li>• The faithful and true witness.</li> <li>• The beginning of God's creation.</li> </ul>  |
| Commendations      | None   |
| Rebukes            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other.</li> <li>• You are lukewarm... <b>nauseating</b>.</li> <li>• You <b>don't know</b> your true condition. You think you are rich and have no needs but in reality you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. Blindness to our true condition is the cause of lukewarmness.</li> </ul> |
| Commands           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buy gold from me... so you can be rich.</li> <li>• Buy white garments from me... so you can be clothed.</li> <li>• Buy eye salve from me... so you can see.</li> <li>• Be zealous!</li> <li>• Repent!</li> </ul>  |
| Promises           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I reprove and discipline the ones I love.</li> <li>• I'm <b>knocking</b> at the door... if you open it, I will come in.</li> <li>• The one who conquers will sit with me on my throne.</li> </ul>   |
| Threats            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be spit out of Jesus' mouth.</li> <li>• Reproof and discipline.</li> </ul>   |

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Major Theme    | Jesus is looking for followers full of zeal and fiery passion. Lukewarmness makes him nauseous.   |
| Message for Us | <p>Beware <b>Goldilocks</b> Christians! Those who want a faith that is not too hot, not too cold, but tepid and lukewarm.</p> <p><i>The greatest danger to Christianity is, I contend, not heresies, heterodoxies, nor atheists, nor profane secularism.—no, but the kind of orthodoxy which is cordial drivel, mediocrity served up sweet... In the world of mediocrity in which we live it is assumed that only crackpots, fanatics, and the like should be deplored as offensive, as inspired by Satan, and that the middle way is the right way.... What nonsense! Christ is of another mind: mediocrity is the worst offense, the most dangerous kind of <b>demon possession</b>, farthest removed from the possibility of being cured.... This kind of religion is nothing but a deception.<sup>2</sup></i></p> |

### III. Do we have ears to hear what Christ is saying to the churches?

- A. Jesus Christ is to be found “**in the midst of**” and “among” the churches (1:13; 2:1), even though many of them are sinful, heretical and dysfunctional.
- B. Christ is not limited to one church. Each individual church can only **partially** reveal who he is in his fullness. It takes all the churches to manifest his glory.
- C. The Gospel puts us in a community. “Me and Jesus” is not a Biblical way to think! Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father...” The fact of the matter is that we normally go to heaven or to hell **together**. But though each member is part of a bigger family of faith, we each still have personal and individual responsibility. One can be **lost** in a good church. One can be **saved** in a bad church.
- D. The church is a lampstand. Her role is to carry the light of Christ to the nations. This means she is **to expose** what lurks and slithers in darkness. The church is to be the conscience of the world (Babylon). She is to be counter-cultural.
- E. The **destiny** of the world (Revelation 4–22) is determined in church... not in Washington, Wall Street, Hollywood, Harvard, the Pentagon, etc.
- F. The New Testament in general and these letters in particular assume that there is only **one church** in each city.
- G. The challenge of doing church in an evil empire is really defined by a small number of obstacles and hindrances that are present in every age in every place:
  1. **Bad theology** (heresy, false prophets, etc.).
  2. **Persecution** (John 15:18–16:4).
  3. **Temptation to sin** (especially to sexual immorality and idolatry/syncretism).

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<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard, *Provocations*, 16.

- H. Church life today seems very different than church life in John's day. Notice the things so prevalent in our typical contemporary church experience that are **not even mentioned** in these letters to the 7 churches:
1. Organizational realities (buildings, committees, finances, constitutions, etc.).
  2. Leadership (pastors, elders, deacons, boards, etc.).
  3. Programs (Sunday School, youth group, worship teams, ministries, pot-luck dinners, small groups, etc.).
- I. When the church falls short of what she ought to be and what she ought to do, the solution is always simple: **Wake up!**
1. Remember.
  2. Repent.
  3. Do the works you did at first.

#### **TABLE TALK**

1. Which of the seven churches is most like your church?
2. In the first century, the major heresies troubling the church related to the Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel. What heresies are troubling the church today?
3. What is God asking you to do?



# The Last Word

A Bible Study on Revelation by Stan Key

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## CHAPTER 4. A GLIMPSE THROUGH THE DOOR (CH. 4:1–5:14)

### I. Behold, a door standing open...

#### A. Looking for the door.

When Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, the way back home was blocked by an angel with a flaming sword (Gen. 3:24). Ever since, we have been groping and searching in hopes of finding “the door” that will lead us back to life as it was meant to be.

1. The **tower of Babel** was a noble attempt to reach “the gate of heaven”<sup>1</sup> (Gen. 11:1–11). The dramatic failure was an eternal object lesson that man, in his own strength and piety, can never find the way to heaven.
2. The revelation of **Jacob’s ladder (stairway)** was God’s solution to a problem that man could not fix. There was indeed a “door” between this world and the next but only God could build it and show man how to find it (Gen. 28:12).
3. The Gospel announces that **Jesus** himself is that ladder (John 1:51). He is **the door** that enables a person to come and go into the very presence of God (John 10:7–10).

Conclusion: There is only **one way** to connect with the other world: through Jesus Christ. The door may be narrow (Luke 13:22–30) but it leads to glorious life, vast and abundant. Finding the door is what life is all about!

#### B. When the door was cracked open.

At key moments in Biblical history, the heavens were **opened** revealing and confirming God’s heavenly purposes for our earthly realities: Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek. 1:1), Jesus’ baptism (Matt. 3:16), the first martyrdom (Acts 7:56), the Gentiles are welcomed into God’s family (Acts 10:11), and when Christ returns in glory (Rev. 19:11).

#### C. Revelation has much to say about doors and keys (1:18; 3:7–8, 20; 4:1).

John sees **a door open** in heaven. It is only because of the door that John is able to understand the purposes of God for the church and for the world.

### II. What John saw and heard (4:1–5:14).

#### A. The door (4:1). A voice like a trumpet issues an invitation:

- *Come up here...* But **where** is heaven? Is it “up”?
- *I will show you what must take place after this...*

#### B. The throne (4:2–11).

1. The One on the throne (4:2–3, 5–6).
  - a. Heaven is not seen as a temple but rather a **throne room** of “the Lord God Almighty” (4:8), who lives forever (4:9–10).

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<sup>1</sup> Babel in Hebrew means “gate of god.”

- b. Rather than attempting to describe the One he saw, John speaks of the bright light reflected from precious stones (jasper, carnelian and emerald) (3).
    - c. The **rainbow** reminds us of God's covenant with Noah. Though disaster is coming on the earth, God has not forgotten his promise (3).
  2. The ones around the throne (4:4-7).
    - a. 24 elders on 24 thrones (4).
      - The number 24 probably signifies 12 tribes and 12 apostles (see 21:12-14).
      - **White** garments connote redemption in the blood of the Lamb (7:14).
      - **Crowns** on their heads (I Cor. 9:25; II Tim. 4:7-8; Jam. 1:12; I Pet. 5:4).
    - b. 4 living creatures (6-7).
      - Full of eyes in front and behind (6)... all around and within (8).
      - A lion, an ox, the face of a man, an eagle in flight (7).
      - Each has six wings (8).
3. What they are doing around the throne (4:8-11).
  - a. **Singing** constantly<sup>2</sup> (8,11).
 

*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,  
Who was and is and is to come! (4:8).*

NOTE: This hymn praises God for **who he is** and mentions 3 attributes:

    - His **holiness**.
    - His **omnipotence**.
    - His **eternity**.

*Worthy are you, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they existed and were created (4:11).*

NOTE: This hymn praises God for **what he has done**, namely in **creation**.
  - b. Giving **glory** and **honor** and **thanks** (9)
  - c. Falling down in worship (10).
  - d. Casting their crowns continually before the throne (10). A crown represents power and **control** as well as wealth, victory and honor. To cast one's crown before the throne is to be fully and unreservedly surrendered to God.

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<sup>2</sup> God's people have always been a singing people. Even in Babylon! There are five hymns in this passage.

NOTE: So far, John's vision of heaven could have been written by any Jew. It is only in the next chapter that his vision becomes "Christian." In chapter 4 God is worshiped as sovereign king for his role in **creation** but in chapter 5 God is worshiped as the Lamb for his work of **redemption**.

C. The scroll (5:1–5).

1. The description of the scroll (1).

The scroll apparently contains the full and detailed account of what God is about to do. It is the record of the destiny of the world. It is **history** written in **advance**. Unless the scroll is opened God's purposes for the future will be thwarted. John weeps because human existence is now meaningless. Perhaps Shakespeare was right:

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
that struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot,  
full of sound and fury signifying nothing.<sup>3</sup>*

2. But who can open the seals? (2–5).

It takes more than power and authority to open the seals. It takes someone who is **worthy**. John is told that the Lion of Judah is worthy to open the scroll. When he looks, John sees a **Lamb**.

D. The Lamb (5:6–14).

1. Who he is and what he does (6–7).

The Lion is the Lamb! The Lamb has 7 horns<sup>4</sup> and 7 eyes and bears the wounds of **sacrificial slaughter**. Note it well: the one who is going to preside over the Last Judgment is "the Lamb, the crucified, the stripped, the annihilated, the weakest of all men, the one who has neither beauty, nor honor, nor power" (Ellul, p. 117).

2. The response of heaven and earth (8–14).

The 4 creatures and the 24 elders fall down before the Lamb in worship each having a harp and bowls of incense (prayers). They sing a **new** song<sup>5</sup> (8–9).

*Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,  
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation,  
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth (5:9–10).*

NOTE: No longer are the angelic beings praising Almighty God for his work in creation. Now they are praising **the Lamb** for his work in redemption.

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<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ???.

<sup>4</sup> In the Old Testament, the horn stands for both power and honor.

<sup>5</sup> The song is "new" not only in terms of time. It is new also in terms of quality.

Myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands of angels<sup>6</sup> begin to sing (11):

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom  
and might and honor and glory and blessing! (5:12)*

Every creature in **heaven** and on **earth** and in **the sea** began to sing:

*To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
Be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!  
And the four living creatures said, "**Amen!**" (5:13–14)*

### III. Worship 101.

When we look through the door to see what is going on in that other world, we see worship! The worship of heaven is the prototype and **model** for every worship service on earth. In recent “worship wars” the focus generally is on things like screens vs hymn books, guitars vs organs, choirs vs worship teams, etc. But if the following three elements are absent, worship is not authentically worship, regardless what **style** it claims to be.

- A. Seeing God **truly**. “If your concept of God is wrong, then the more religious you become the more dangerous you become to yourself and to others.” (William Temple). This passage tells us that the One we worship is holy, majestic, eternal, the Creator, triune, and that worship is centered on the Lamb.
- B. Praising God **passionately**. In the heavenly worship service there is weeping, bowing, and lots of singing. No one slept during that worship service! Worship is a verb (Robert Webber). Most people think that in worship the congregation is the audience, the people on the platform are the performers, and God is the prompter. No! God is **the audience!** The people on the platform are the prompters and the people in the pews are the performers (Kierkegaard).
- C. Offering ourselves **completely**. The worshipers in heaven cast their crowns continuously before the throne. To worship is to surrender everything to the Lamb. “I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual **act of worship**” (Rom. 12:1). And all God’s people said, “**Amen!**”

#### TABLE TALK

1. Describe what a typical worship service is like in your church. How is it similar to the worship of heaven? How is it different?
2. Christianity has been called a “singing religion.” Why? Is this still true? Is there a song in your heart?
3. Revelation 4–5 speaks of worshiping God for his work in creation and worshiping the Lamb for his work in redemption. Are both realities supposed to be present in every worship service?
4. Did you notice the Trinity in our Scripture today? God is one and yet three. How does this impact worship?
5. Have you been involved in the “worship wars” of recent years? What did you learn? Has this study confirmed your ideas about worship or changed them?

<sup>6</sup> A myriad is 10,000. Therefore, 10,000 times 10,000 then multiplied by 1,000 times 1,000, comes to 100 trillion.



# The Last Word

A Bible Study on Revelation by Stan Key

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## CHAPTER 5. WHO CAN STAND? (CH. 6:1–8:1)

### I. Introduction.

- A. In our last lesson we were introduced to the scroll that was in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne (5:1). Only the Lamb was worthy to open the seals.
- The scroll symbolizes the destiny of the world, **human history** written in advance.
  - The writing on front and back of the scroll means everything was written that could be written. Everything we **need to know** is included.
  - The seals were probably seven globs of wax “gluing” the scroll together with the signet ring of the king imprinted in the wax. The contents were **secret** unless someone worthy could be found to open the seals.
- B. This unfolding of human history can be seen as either, 1) a picture of specific future events, or 2) a statement about human history in general. (Perhaps we don't have to choose. Maybe **both** statements are true).

### II. Six Seals are Opened (6:1–17).

- A. The first four seals comprise the famous “**Four Horsemen** of the Apocalypse.” The 7<sup>th</sup> seal will be opened in chapter 8, making possible the seven trumpets (chapters 8–11).
1. The first seal (6:1–2). The white horse.
    - Description: The rider has a bow and a crown. He has come **to conquer**.
    - Significance: But who is this horse and rider? There are two basic options:
      - a. He may represent **Jesus Christ** (cf. 19:11). This would mean that Christ precedes his judgments in the earth. His Gospel will have a victorious progress in the world. It must be preached to **all nations**, and then the end will come (Matt. 24:14). In this sense, he is very different from the other three horsemen.
      - b. He may represent an **evil imperialistic** influence coming on the earth (perhaps, even **Antichrist**). In this sense he is similar to the other three horsemen.
  2. The second seal (6:3–4). The bright red horse.
    - Description: The rider has a great sword and he takes peace from the earth so that people **destroy one another**.
    - Significance: History will be characterized by **militaristic politics**.

3. The third seal (6:5–6). The black horse.
  - Description: The rider holds a pair of scales to measure the price of food (a day’s wage buys a quart of wheat; enough for one person to subsist on). Yet oil and wine (luxury items) are plentiful.
  - Significance: History will be characterized by **economic injustice** and famine.

4. The fourth seal (6:7–8). The pale horse.
  - Description: The rider’s name is Death and Hades is following him. They are given permission to kill 25% of the earth’s population by sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts.
  - Significance: History will be characterized by **death** and suffering.

NOTE: “Instead of discussing the probable significance of each of the four colored horses, those first listeners would undoubtedly have recoiled in terror as war, bloodshed, famine, and death galloped furiously across the stage of their imagination. Visions at best are to be **experienced** rather than analyzed.” (Mounce, p. 145f).

5. The fifth seal (6:9–11).
  - Description: John sees martyrs under the altar in heaven, crying out “**How long**, O Lord?” They were given white robes and told to wait a little longer until the full number of martyrs was complete.
  - Significance: **Martyrdom** is part of the story. There is nothing in this passage to cause us to believe we will be “raptured” away so as not to experience tribulation and persecution (cf. Rev. 7:14). The prayer of the suffering church is not for personal vengeance and retaliation. But rather for **justice** to be done in the earth and God’s reputation to be enhanced.

6. The sixth seal (6:12–17).
  - Description: John sees great cosmic signs (earthquake, stars fall, sky vanishes like a scroll, etc.). People scramble to find a place to hide from the wrath of the Lamb. They fear God’s **face** more than death itself! *Who can stand?*
  - Significance: As the divine judgment unfolds, it get progressively worse. Things fall apart! Envisioning an **angry lamb** requires sanctified imagination.

B. Lessons revealed in the unsealing of the scroll:

1. Human history is composed of wars, injustice, famine, disease, earthquakes, and death. Don’t be surprised by this. **Expect it!** (John 15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; I Thess. 3:3; II Tim. 3:12; I Pet. 4:1, 12).
2. God is **in control**. Nothing happens, not even the worst disasters and persecutions, without the **permission** of God himself.

3. God is working out his purposes even when it feels like **all hell** is breaking loose.
4. God's people can have peace and security even in the midst of total chaos. The Lamb wins! As the scroll is **unsealed**, God's people are **sealed** (7:1-3) so that they can finally **stand** (7:9). The four horsemen don't have the last word! Another Horse and Rider are on the way (19:11).

### III. The Wrath of the Lamb (6:16).

The picture of an angry lamb is startling! And yet this image (as well as this entire passage about the seven seals unleashing God's judgment on the earth) reminds us of several important truths about the wrath of God.

- A. *Defining anger.* We tend to think of anger as a bad thing, something to be avoided, a synonym of hatred, vindictiveness, spite, rage, loss of temper, and the like. But God gets angry and he is without sin. Saints too get angry yet need not sin (see Rev. 6:10). Holy anger, righteous indignation is a "**passionate againstness.**"<sup>1</sup> The thing that makes anger good or bad is:
  1. Its **object** (What/who am I angry at?).
  2. Its **expression** (How do I manifest my anger?).
- B. *The fact of God's anger.* Those who try to depict God as a grandfatherly senile benevolence in heaven are sadly mistaken. Those who think that divine wrath is only found in the **Old Testament** and not in the New, simply don't know their Bibles.
- C. *The terror of God's anger.* God's wrath causes kings and generals to flee in panic to caves seeking to escape (Rev. 6:15-17). But there will be nowhere **to hide** (cf. Gen. 3:8).
- D. *The manner (method) of God's anger.* God's wrath is seen in war, famine, disease, etc. as well as in a future day when we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Many of his "judgments" are simply permitting the **consequences** of sin to come to full fruition.

*For the wrath of God **is** revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness **suppress** the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.... So they are without excuse.... Therefore God **gave them up** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.... For this reason God **gave them up** to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God **gave them up** to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.... Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them (Rom. 1:18-32).*

- E. *The motive of God's anger.* It is the crucified Lamb of God who is unleashing these judgments. His motive is **love**.

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 165.

- F. *The time of God's anger.* Though the ultimate expression of divine wrath lies in the future at the final judgment (Rev. 19:15), much of God's wrath is experienced **now**, in this life (Rom. 1:18ff.; Eph. 5:6; I Thess. 2:16).
- G. *The protection from God's anger.* There is only one place to find safety when judgment on sin falls on the earth: in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The thought of God's wrath may be **unpopular**, but it is true (John 1:29; Rom. 5:9; I Thess. 1:10). ...*that on that cross as Jesus died the wrath of God was satisfied...* (*In Christ Alone*, lyrics by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty).<sup>2</sup>
- H. *The reason for God's anger.* The Gospels are quite clear about those things that made Jesus angry. The wrath of the Lamb (Jesus) is focused on specific attitudes and behaviors. So, what made Jesus angry?
1. Mark 3:5. **Hard hearts** and a willful rejection of the truth.
  2. Mark 10:14. Those who **hinder others** from coming to Christ.
  3. John 2:13–17. Treating as **common** that which is holy.
- I. *The imitation of God's anger.* The cleansing blood of Jesus and the sanctifying Spirit of Pentecost mean that in Christ we are now able to express anger even as Jesus did. In fact, God **wants** us to be angry at the same things and in the same way that Jesus was (is!). Righteous indignation is part of the **image of God** that is desperately needed in our day. *Be angry and do not sin....* (Eph. 4:25–27) But remember, you are not the judge! *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, **I will repay**, says the Lord" ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* (Rom. 12:14, 17–21)

#### TABLE TALK

1. Do you think of the unfolding scroll of your life as a happy story or as a tale of tragedy and suffering? Explain.
2. Describe your own thoughts and feelings about the wrath of God. How has the Bible study today challenged those beliefs and those feelings?
3. What makes God angry? How does he express it? What makes you angry? How do you express it? Now, what have you learned?
4. Where are angry Christians needed in the world today?
5. Do you think of martyrdom as part of the normal Christian life? Why or why not?

<sup>2</sup> The Presbyterian Church (USA) wanted to include this song in their hymnal but were offended by these words and suggested that they be changed to read "... the love of God was magnified." The authors refused and so the song was dropped from their hymnal.



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## CHAPTER 6. SAFE AND SECURE (CH. 7:1–17)

### I. Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Seal... a Pregnant Pause.

#### A. The six seals.

In chapter 6 the first six seals of the scroll in God's right hand were opened. As the destiny of the world unfolded one seal at a time, there was a growing crescendo of wrath, judgment and catastrophe on the earth:

1. The first four seals released the four horsemen of the apocalypse:
  - The white horse (6:1–2). The imperialistic **Antichrist**.
  - The red horse (6:3–4). **Militaristic** politics.
  - The black horse (6:5–6). Economic **injustice**.
  - The pale horse (6:7–8). **Death** and suffering.
2. The 5<sup>th</sup> seal (6:9–11). **Persecution** of Christians.
3. The 6<sup>th</sup> seal (6:12–17). **Cosmic** calamities and the wrath of the Lamb.

#### B. Before the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is opened (8:1), there is an interlude, a pregnant pause.

Remember that this book is written by a pastor concerned for his flock. The question that is begging to be answered is therefore this: what is going to happen to **Christians** during this coming period of wrath and judgment upon the earth?!

### II. Preparing for Tribulation (7:1–17).

Pastor John wants his congregation to **experience** two realities as they anticipate the horror about to be unleashed on the world: 1) The need to be **sealed** (7:1–8), and 2) the **hope** of a glorious future (7:9–17).

#### A. The sealing of the saints (7:1–8).

1. Four angels, four corners, and four winds (v. 1). The 4 destructive winds may be another way of describing the 4 horsemen. The angels are “holding back” the disastrous events about to be unleashed until something of great importance occurs.
2. Another angel explains the reason for the delay (vv. 2–3): “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”
  - God is apparently concerned about the **ecological well-being** of the planet (earth, sea and trees). The Bible has much to say about creation care.
  - As the scroll is **unsealed** the servants of God are **sealed**. The choice of wording cannot be accidental.
  - See part III for more discussion of this important matter.
3. The number of the sealed (vv. 4–8). The number 144,000 is a “suspiciously tidy sort of number that is much more likely to be a symbol than a statistic” (Wilcock, p. 80). The number is attained when 12, the number of tribes, is both

squared and multiplied by a thousand, a twofold way of emphasizing **completeness** (Mounce, p. 158). Further underscoring the symbolic nature of the 144,000 number is:

- The list of the 12 tribes (vv. 5–8) is somewhat irregular. Joseph and his son Manasseh are included but his son Ephraim is not. Dan is omitted entirely. Thus it seems the list is meant to indicate “**all Israel** will be saved” (Rom. 11:26). But be careful: defining “Israel” may be harder than you think!
- In the rest of the passage the 144,000 seem to morph into the “great multitude that **no one could number**” (7:9).

*Conclusion:* People have debated the number of those who will be saved for centuries (see Luke 13:23). Though the question is important it is apparently something that God does not intend for us to know... or fret about! Rather, he wants us to simply rest in the fact that “**the Lord knows** those who are his” (II Tim. 2:19).

C. Salvation belongs to our God! (7:9–17).

It is difficult to determine whether this scene in heaven is in the future or whether it is going on right now. Perhaps the answer is both! God is eternal and not subject to time (an eternal **now**), so John’s description of heaven is something we are to simply embrace and experience. Earlier when John had looked into heaven, the focus of his attention was **the throne** and the Lamb (ch. 4–5). In this vision the throne and the Lamb are still center stage, but his focus is on **the multitude** around the throne.

1. Their *number*. The multitude was vast, innumerable (v. 9).
2. Their *origin*. Those around the throne came from every **ethnic group** on earth. These were not just Jews (the 12 tribes) but men and women from every nation, tribe, people, language (v. 9).
3. Their *dress*. John is struck by the **white robes** the redeemed are wearing.
  - In heaven we will not revert back to an Eden-like paradise where we need no clothing (Gen. 2:25). Even forgiven sin still has consequences. Though the death of the Lamb of God makes us pure, it does not make us **innocent**.
  - The whiteness of the robes is due to the fact that they have been washed (they were dirty once) in **blood** (v. 14)! It takes sanctified imagination to understand how red blood can make garments white. But the imagery points to Christ’s atoning work on the cross (**justification** by faith).
4. Their *journey*. When asked from where this multitude has come, John is told: “These are the ones coming (present tense) out of the (definite article) great tribulation” (v. 14). The Lamb suffered and those who follow him will likewise experience times of trial and tribulation. NOTE: God’s people are saved **through** tribulation, not **from** it!

5. Their *activity*.

- Perhaps most startling of all, these people were **standing** (v. 9. See 6:17) in the very presence of Almighty and thrice-holy God!
- They are **servicing** God day and night (v. 15). The Greek word *latreuo* refers to works of various kinds that are done out of devotion to God.
- But primarily they are **worshipping** God... loudly, enthusiastically, with palm branches and songs of praise (vv. 9–12) Two songs are mentioned:

*Salvation belongs to our God  
who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb! (v. 10).<sup>1</sup>*

*Amen<sup>2</sup>! Blessing and glory and wisdom  
and thanksgiving and honor and power and might  
be to our God forever and ever! Amen (v. 12).*

6. Their *blessed state*. Heaven is described as a place of **shelter** (v. 15) from the judgments and punishments ravaging the earth as the seals are being opened. The Lamb will **shepherd** his sheep (v. 17). Note the reversal of roles! But especially, heaven is described as a place where certain realities are absent: no hunger, no thirst, no scorching heat, no tears... no unmet desire, no danger.

D. Does being heavenly minded mean that we are of no earthly good?

Many pretend that Christians believe in **pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by** and thus have no concerns about life here below. But John believes just the opposite. It is the hope of heaven that enables his congregation to be of service here, now, in this world.

1. Only when we know the destination does our **journey** make sense!
2. Only when we know the destination do we have a real reason to take care of the **highway**! Christians care about Babylon and seek her well-being (Jer. 29:7). (Illustration: the road to nowhere).
3. Hope for tomorrow makes it possible to live in **victory** today.
4. We are saved **in hope**... and hope that is seen is not hope! (Rom. 8:18–25).

III. The Sealing of the Saints.

To be able to “stand” when tribulation comes, we must first be sealed (7:1–4).

A. The *nature* of the sealing.

In the ancient world a seal was a mark or a visible sign that was placed on an object (letter, will, bill of sale, etc.) or a person (a servant or slave) to denote **ownership**. When it involved a person, the seal was often put on the **forehead** (Rev. 7:3; cf. 14:1) which meant it was sometimes more evident to others than to yourself! Satan loves to **counterfeit** God’s work. He too has a form of marking and sealing those who belong to him! (See Rev. 13:16–18). NOTE: Our eternal destiny will be determined by whose seal marks us; to whom do we belong?

<sup>1</sup>This is a song that only the redeemed can sing! Because angels have not experienced redemption, they are not singing this hymn. But they will join wholeheartedly in the next song of worship ( vv. 11–12).

<sup>2</sup>Jesus often began his words with “Amen, Amen, I say unto you...” The word means to affirm that which is certain and reliable, that which can be trusted. Thus it can begin a prayer as well as end it.

- B. The *background* for understanding the sealing.
- Exodus 28:36–38. The gold plate on Aaron’s forehead: “**Holy to the Lord.**”
  - Ezekiel 9:1–6. Killer angels mark with a “taw” the foreheads of those who **grieve over Jerusalem**. These only will be spared. Begin at the sanctuary!
- C. The *purpose* of the sealing. This sealing is intended to do two things:
1. Designate those who belong to him and make them **secure**.
  2. **Protect** them from judgment and wrath... but not from tribulations. They will be saved **through** trials, not from them. Charles Spurgeon said it well:
 

*It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord. Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honor, death is his gain.*<sup>3</sup>
- D. *How* can I be sealed?
1. Come to **the Lamb** and let his blood forgive your sins and purify your heart (white robes). The verb tense of Rev. 7:14 (aorist) means that this is a **once-for-all** action.
  2. Be **filled** with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit **is** God’s seal on our lives; the mark of his ownership, the **guarantee** of his protection and provision.
 

*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee [down payment] of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13–14).*

#### TABLE TALK

1. This study claims that Christians are saved through tribulation not from it. Describe your reaction to this statement. Does this fit your experience.? your theology?
2. How do you envision heaven? Does your vision of heaven make you want to go?
3. Have you known any Christians who were so heavenly minded they were no earthly good? What about you? Do your thoughts of heaven make you less concerned for the physical needs of those around you or more concerned? Explain.
4. How do you understand the “sealing” of the Holy Spirit? Has this lesson changed your thinking or confirmed it?
5. Do you have assurance of your standing before God?

<sup>3</sup> Wilcox, *The Message of Revelation*, 83.



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## CHAPTER 7. HOLY SMOKE (CH. 8–9)

- I. The 7<sup>th</sup> seal makes it possible for the 7 trumpets to sound (8:1–5).
- A. The 7 Seals (chapters 6–7).

We have seen that as the Lamb opened the six seals (6:1–17), the destiny of the world unfolded, one horrific revelation at a time: war, famine, disease, death, persecution, etc. We saw that these events may represent human history **in general** or they may hint at things to come (cosmic calamities in the 6<sup>th</sup> seal, for example). But once the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is opened (8:1), we are clearly dealing with realities still in the **future**, both for John 2,000 years ago and for us today. You may think life on planet earth has been difficult under the reality portrayed by the 7 seals but wait till you see what happens when the 7 trumpets start blow!

- B. Read 8:1–5. At least three elements of this passage deserve comment:

1. “About half an hour” of **silence** (8:1).

Revelation is a **noisy** book (loud voices, huge choirs, thunder, earthquakes, horses in full gallop, etc.). But for 30 dramatic minutes there was silence! You may say, “That’s not very long.” But when you are dealing with a great congregation of people, even two or three minutes of silence can feel like an eternity! George Frederick Handel understood the dramatic power of silence in music and used it very effectively in the *Hallelujah Chorus*. During the half hour of silence two things were happening (see #2 and #3).

2. Seven angels<sup>1</sup> are given **seven trumpets** (8:2).

At first a curved ram’s horn (*shophar*) and then long, straight metal “trumpets”, these instruments were not yet developed to the point of making “music” as we think of trumpets today. Rather they were used primarily to get people’s attention:

- To **assemble** the people (break camp, an announcement, etc.) (Numbers 10:1–10).
- To warn of **danger** (invasion, enemy attack, etc.) (Amos 3:6).
- To prepare for **battle**. To arms! (Joshua 6:4–21; Judges 7:16–20; Job 39:24–25).
- To announce the **arrival** of some great person; the king, perhaps (Matt. 24:31; I Cor. 15:52; I Thess. 4:15–16).
- To **celebrate** in worship, feasting, offerings, coronations, dedications, etc. (Lev. 25:9; Num. 10:10; II Kings 9:13; II Chron. 5:12; 29:27–28; Ezra 3:10).

The seven trumpets of Revelation seem to signal all of the above!

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<sup>1</sup> When you think of “angels” don’t think of cute, cuddly, chubby cherubs with stubby wings that are often portrayed in pop culture. No! Think mighty warriors, armed and dangerous.

3. Another angel with a **censer** (8:3–5).

The angel took incense and mixed it with “the prayers of all the saints.” First, he allowed the smoke to rise to the throne, then he took the coals from the censer and cast the fire down on the earth. The silence was suddenly broken by “peals of thunder, rumblings (literally, voices), flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.” (8:5). During the silence, God was listening to the prayers of his people on earth, suffering as the first six seals were opened. The smoke of prayer **goes up** and the fire of judgment **comes down!**

- C. The 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet (11:15–19).

Six trumpets are blown in rapid succession in chapters 8 and 9. Then there is an interlude, another pregnant pause (10:1–11:14). When the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet is blown all **heaven** breaks loose! The culmination of human history is gloriously proclaimed.

*Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (11:15).<sup>2</sup>*

When we pray the words Jesus taught us (...*thy kingdom come*...), we are pleading with God to let the 7<sup>th</sup> angel blow his trumpet. But remember: before the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet can sound, the first six must be played.

## II. Six Trumpets (8:6–9:21).

- A. The 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet (8:7). These judgments fall on the **earth**. Hail and fire mixed with blood. A third of the earth is burned up.
- B. The 2<sup>nd</sup> trumpet (8:8–9). These judgments fall on the **salt waters**. Something like a mountain of fire is thrown into the ocean. A third of the sea becomes blood, a third of the sea creatures die, and a third of the ships are destroyed.
- C. The 3<sup>rd</sup> trumpet (8:10–11). These judgments fall on the **fresh waters**. A blazing star named Wormwood falls to earth. A third of the waters become bitter (toxic) and many people die.
- D. The 4<sup>th</sup> trumpet (8:12). These judgments fall on the **heavens**. A third of the sun, moon and stars are struck and a third of all light is lost.

A brief interlude occurs when an eagle flies through the heavens screeching “Woe, woe, woe!”. The next three trumpets will bring three horrible woes.

- E. The 5<sup>th</sup> trumpet/the first woe (9:1–12).

John saw a “star fallen from heaven to earth.” This was probably a vision of Satan (Lucifer) and his expulsion from heaven (Isaiah 14:12; Luke 10:18). Having the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit, he releases swarms of **locusts**. These creatures will torment everyone who does not have God’s seal on their forehead. In the Bible, locusts are often used for divine judgment (Exodus 10:1–20; Joel 1:4; 2:5) but this locust invasion is undoubtedly the worst!

What these locusts look like (vv. 7–11):

- Like horses prepared for battle.
- Crowns of gold on their **human-like** heads.

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<sup>2</sup> George Frederick Handel knew his Bible well and included this verse in the climactic portion of the *Hallelujah Chorus*.

- Hair like a woman's, **teeth** like a lion, breastplates of iron.
- When they fly it sounds like a **stampede** of horses and chariots.
- **Tails** that sting.

What these locusts do (vv. 4–6, 10):

- **Spare** those who are marked with God's seal and spare the grass and trees (but grass and trees are precisely what locusts normally eat).
- Inflict **pain** on people (but don't kill them) with the sting in their tails... like a scorpion.
- This will last 5 months (about the life-span of a locust).
- People prefer death to the pain and torment of the sting.

But the real explanation for the diabolical terror caused by these locusts is that their king is the angel of the bottomless pit: **Apollyon** (Greek) or Abaddon (Hebrew)... the Destroyer.

F. The 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet / the second woe (9:13–21).

A demonic army is released from the east numbering **200 million** mounted troops!<sup>3</sup> The riders wore breastplates “the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur” (v. 17). But the most terrifying aspect of this army was the **horses**:

- Heads like a lions' heads
- Out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. This created three plagues that killed **a third** of the earth's population.
- Their tails were like **serpents**... they bite!

And yet the survivors still refused to **repent** of their evil deeds (murders, sorceries<sup>4</sup>, sexual immorality) and they continued “worshiping demons and idols” (vv. 20–21). Thus we see that God's purpose in sending the 6 judgments on the earth was not punitive but **redemptive**.

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting **anyone** to perish, but **everyone** to come to repentance (II Peter 3:9 NIV; see also Ezekiel 18:23).*

God will do whatever it takes to bring us to repentance. If he can't succeed in this endeavor by **preaching** (Acts 2:38) or by showing us **goodness** (Romans 2:4), then sometimes the only method left is to allow suffering and pain to come in like a flood.

*God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His **megaphone** to rouse a deaf world.... No doubt pain as God's megaphone is a terrible instrument; it may lead to final and unrepented rebellion. But it gives the only opportunity the bad man can have for amendment. It removes the veil; it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul.<sup>5</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> “Twice ten thousand times ten thousand” (v. 16). Do the math.

<sup>4</sup> In Greek, *pharmakon* denotes the use of drugs or enchantments and on occasion referred to poisoning. These things were often associated with the occult (thus, sorceries).

<sup>5</sup> Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 74, 76.

### III. Holy Smoke.

The 7 trumpets are blown because the people of God pray. It is only as the prayers of God's people go up that the fire of God's judgment comes down (8:1–5). Chapters 8–9 are not really about the end of the world but rather about the **power of prayer!** Prayer is and always has been the saints' **nuclear option**. Pastor John knew that his congregation was living in an evil empire (Babylon). He wanted to encourage them to pray.

- A. Never underestimate the **sound of silence**. Rising smoke makes no sound. But don't be fooled. It has the capacity to create thunder in the earth! In the late 1970s a delegation from the World Council of Churches went to Russia to report on the state of the church under an atheistic regime. The delegates were not impressed. Their report coldly stated: "It's just a bunch of **old ladies praying**." Revelation helps us to understand that wicked thugs and tyrants everywhere should tremble when old ladies pray!
- B. No prayer is **wasted**. The censer had to be filled before the fire was cast down (8:3–5). Like a suspended water bucket at a water park, it tips over only when it is full. So God's judgments are released in the earth only when the "prayer bucket" is full of the petitions and intercessions of his saints. No prayer is ever lost. They are all stored in his "bucket." David prayed: *You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in **your bottle**. Are they not in your book?* (Psalm 56:8)
- C. Prayer is **pleasing** to God. Prayer is mixed with incense. It is a pleasing fragrance, an aroma that brings pleasure to God. Paul tells us to "find out what pleases the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10). Now we know.
- D. Prayer is more **powerful** than you imagine. It may often seem that prayer is just a quiet, contemplative spiritual discipline that affects no one but the one praying. But more is happening that you can ever imagine!

*Little boy kneels at the foot of the bed,  
Droops on the little hands little gold head.  
Hush, hush, whisper who dares?  
Christopher Robin is saying his prayers.<sup>6</sup>*

- E. Prayer encourages God to do whatever it takes to bring people to **repentance**. Be sobered by what your prayers may unleash! God will do whatever it takes to bring this world to repentance. Before all heaven breaks loose, he may permit all hell to break loose! So go ahead, pray... but be prepared for what your prayers may produce.

*Prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer is the greater work.<sup>7</sup>*

*God instituted prayer in order to lend to his creatures the dignity of causality.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Milne, *Vespers*.

<sup>7</sup> Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, ???.

<sup>8</sup> Pascal, *Pensees*.

### **TABLE TALK**

1. What has God said to you during this lesson?
2. How do you respond when you read of God's wrath and judgment falling on sinners?
3. What did it take to bring you to a place of repentance?
4. Has this lesson changed the way you think about prayer? How?
5. Will your prayer life be different?

## The Key to Joy

*By Stan Key*

Broken heart and shattered world,  
The center cannot hold;  
My faith is feeble, hope is spent,  
My love has grown so cold.  
It seems, O Lord, that all is lost,  
I don't know what to do;  
In dark despair, my only cry:  
"All I *have* is You."

And then—a slender ray of hope  
Illuminates my tomb;  
A tiny spark, the faintest prayer,  
Is kindled in the gloom.  
I grope for words to help express  
What I now see is true:  
Into the void I whisper them:  
"All I *need* is You."

The world around me hasn't changed,  
The status quo's in place.  
But in my heart there's been a shift  
For I have seen His face.  
And though the old is present yet  
I know there's something new;  
For now I've found the key to joy;  
"All I *want* is You!"



is not in the thunders but in the little scroll. The angel raised his right hand and gave a solemn oath:

- There will be no more **delay**. Once the last trumpet sounds, the final events of human history will be set in motion. Time's up!
- When the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet sounds, the **mystery of God** will be revealed. The term refers to the coming reality that the kingdoms of this world will all become the kingdom of Christ. And he will reign forever and ever (11:15)!

2. Read 10:8–11. The little scroll and its impact on John.

The mighty angel tells John to “take” the scroll. John hesitates and asks that the angel would “give” it. No! You must **take** it and **eat** it! Jeremiah and Ezekiel also ate the book of God (Jer. 15:16; Ezek. 3:1–3). Though it was **sweet** in his mouth, it was **bitter** in his stomach. With the little scroll now inside of him, John was commanded to proclaim the Word.

D. The two witnesses preach the Word and are martyred (11:1–14).

1. Read 11:1–3. Measure the temple of God.

John is commanded to measure the temple, the altar, and **the worshipers...** but not the court of the Gentiles. The nations will “trample the holy city” for 42 months (or 1260 days, or 3 ½ years).

2. Read 11:4–14. The two witnesses.

Few passages anywhere in the Bible are more **difficult** to interpret than this! But before we try to interpret the meaning, let's make a few observations:

- a. The two witnesses are clothed in **sackcloth** and called “olive trees” and “lampstands” (11:3–4).
- b. They have supernatural powers (fire from mouth, no rain, water into blood, plagues, etc.) (11:5–6) but their real ministry is to witness... to proclaim **the truth**.
- c. The Beast<sup>3</sup> kills them (11:7).
- d. The city called “**Sodom**,” “**Egypt**,” and the place where their Lord was crucified (11:8).
- e. People will **celebrate** their death, exchanging presents, etc. (11:9–10).
- f. The dead witnesses are raised from the dead after 3 ½ days and taken bodily into heaven (11:11–12).
- g. A great earthquake strikes the city and 7,000 die (11:13).

Though many commentators want to make the two witnesses into historical persons (Moses and Elijah, for example), claim the city is a geographical city (Jerusalem), and go to great lengths to determine when these events will occur and which temple it is that is to be measured... my attempt to discern the meaning of the text is much more humble. It seems to me that the wiser path is

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<sup>3</sup> Note the definite article. This is not “a beast” but “the Beast.” We have already seen in Revelation that Antichrist is at work in the world (6:1–2; 9:1–2, 11; etc.).

to see chapters 10–11 as a **symbolic** expression of how Christians are to witness to the truth while living in the evil empire in times of tribulation.

A number of scholars believe **the message** contained in the scroll that John eats in chapter 10 is in fact the story he tells of the two witnesses in chapter 11. In other words, when a follower of Christ eats “the Book”, he/she will become **a witness** and his testimony will be similar to that of the two martyrs depicted here.

3. Numerous indications in the text itself, encourage a symbolic interpretation.
  - a. The **temple** in Jerusalem was no longer standing when John wrote the book of Revelation. When John then measured “the temple” and the “worshippers” (11:1), he was probably speaking of the church, the people of God (I Cor. 3:16; etc.).
  - b. The **42 months** (1260 days, 3 ½ years) (11:2–3; 12:6; 13:5) is surely symbolic. To what does it refer?<sup>4</sup> It is very difficult to know and probably should be left without a specific definition until God gives further clarification.
  - c. The two witnesses are called “**lampstands**” (11:4), symbols of the churches (1:20). Note that only two of the seven churches were blameless (chs. 2–3). Christ had nothing negative to say about Smyrna or Philadelphia. Perhaps the two witnesses stand for that part of the church which has never compromised the truth, as the other five churches did, and is wholly faithful, even **unto death**.
  - d. Though the city is identified as the place where the “Lord was crucified,” it is also called “Sodom” and “Egypt” (11:8). It appears John has a bigger “city” in mind than the literal Jerusalem, that he is speaking of the “**city of man**” in opposition to the “**City of God**” (see chapters 21–22).<sup>5</sup>

CONCLUSION: In his two visions (eating the scroll in chapter 10 and the two witnesses of chapter 11), Pastor John is answering two questions that persecuted Christians and the suffering church always ask:

Question 1: *How long, O Lord?* (chapter 10).

Answer: Once the 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet blows, there will be **no more delay**.

Question 2: *What is the role of the church in tumultuous times?* (chapter 11).

Answer: **Be witnesses**. Though the mission is difficult and dangerous, ultimate victory is certain.

### III. Being Effective Witnesses in the Evil City

#### A. **Eat** this Book.

1. You are what you eat!
2. You must **take** the Book, not wait for someone to give it to you.
3. One of the surest marks of spiritual maturity is the ability to **feed yourself**.
4. You must bite off, chew, savor, swallow and **digest** God’s Word.

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<sup>4</sup> Scholars note that Antiochus Epiphanes tyrannized Jerusalem for 42 months and that there were 42 encampments of Israel in the wilderness (Num. 33:5ff.).

<sup>5</sup> In fact, a very good title for the book of Revelation could be “A Tale of Two Cities.”

5. Eat **all** the Book... the parts you do understand and the parts you don't.
6. Today, we find many eating **disorders** in the church!
7. God's Word is sweet like honey but it sometimes has a **bitter** after effect because the Word reminds us of the coming judgment and our call to lay down our lives.
8. When you've assimilated the Word into your very being, then....

B. **Proclaim** the Word.

Only when we have digested the Book are we ready to speak the truth and be witnesses. While not every believer is called to be a preacher, we are all called to be witnesses. It takes great **courage** to name the Name! This involves two things:

1. Measuring **the temple** (the people of God) (11:1-3). *For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (I Peter 4:17)*
2. Evangelizing **the city** (the Gentiles) (11:4-13). *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matt. 24:14).*

C. **Lay down** your life.

But those who proclaim the Word and witness to Jesus inflame the anger of **the Beast** and invite the hatred of **the world**. The Greek word for witness is *martus*. In the early church, to be a witness and to be a martyr were two ways of saying the same thing.

IV. Marching Orders for the Church (Acts 1:6-8).

This passage gives us six truths about being a witness in an evil age:

- A. **You** will be my witnesses (this is not a gifting for some but a privilege for all).
- B. You will **be** my witnesses (not, "you shall do witnessing").
- C. You will be **my** witnesses (of me).
- D. You will be my **witnesses** (martyrs).
- E. Witness begins **at home** (Jerusalem).
- F. To obey these marching orders requires **Pentecostal power**.

**TABLE TALK**

1. Why does the world hate Christians so passionately?
2. You are what you eat. How does this explain our culture? Our church? Our family?
3. Describe your Bible study routine. Do you "eat" the word?
4. What is the difference between "doing witnessing" and "being a witness"?
5. Does the American church regard martyrdom as something strange and foreign to the Gospel or something integral to it?
6. What is the relationship between witnessing and the infilling of the Holy Spirit?

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# Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending

*By Charles Wesley*

Lo! He comes with clouds descending,  
Once for favored sinners slain;  
Thousand thousand saints attending,  
Swell the triumph of His train:  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!  
God appears on earth to reign.

Every eye shall now behold Him  
Robed in dreadful majesty;  
Those who set at naught and sold Him,  
Pierced and nailed Him to the tree,  
Deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing,  
Shall the true Messiah see.

Now redemption, long expected,  
See in solemn pomp appear;  
All His saints, by man rejected,  
Now shall meet Him in the air:  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!  
See the day of God appear!

Answer Thine own bride and Spirit,  
Hasten, Lord, the general doom!  
The new Heav'n and earth t'inherit,  
Take Thy pining exiles home:  
All creation, all creation, all creation,  
Travails! groans! and bids Thee come!

The dear tokens of His passion  
Still His dazzling body bears;  
Cause of endless exultation  
To His ransomed worshippers;  
With what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture  
Gaze we on those glorious scars!

Yea, Amen! let all adore Thee,  
High on Thine eternal throne;  
Savior, take the power and glory,  
Claim the kingdom for Thine own;  
O come quickly! O come quickly! O come quickly!  
Everlasting God, come down!